

THE MURDER OF MUMBAI'S MILLS AND MARATHON OF MALLS

CA. (Mrs.) RESHMI M. GURNANI

(FCA, M PHIL, M COM, PGDBM)

Mobile : 9822550900 email : gurnanireshmi@gmail.com

Smt. CHANDIBAI HIMATHMAL MANSUKHANI COLLEGE

Abstract:

Once the largest source of employment in the city, Mumbai's textile mills are reminders of their glorious past. In the past two decades mill after mill has died a slow death and scores of workers reduced to penury. All these textile mills which are now closed occupy 600 acres of land in the heart of Mumbai, the future of Mumbai depends on the development of this land.

This paper attempts to explore the rise and fall of Mumbai's textile mills industry, its ultimate death and the so called massive makeover of that land in the form of number of malls coming up on the tomb of mills.

In this connection, this paper also sheds light on the problems of the ongoing mall mania.

Key words: *Mumbai's Mills, Malls, Redevelopment*

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1. Introduction

The fate of Mumbai's textile mill industry, its working class, and the valuable swathes of land its mills occupy in the centre of the city, is an echo of a familiar urban theme. Claims on land and space have been the narrative thread of the most celebrated and most notorious chapters in the urban history of Mumbai. These range from the legendary reclamations that linked up several marshy outposts and settlements to compose the island city in the eighteenth century, to the extension of the railways which promoted suburban development, to the land-grabbing and builder mafias of contemporary Mumbai.

The historic mills of the city are industrial dinosaurs dotted around the city landscape, whose textile production has been eclipsed in efficiency and profitability by the sweatshop labour employed in power loom towns like Bhiwandi and Malegaon. The uncompromising militancy of the great textile strike in the early eighties convinced the city mill owners that dealing with the unions was unnecessary when production could be maintained in power loom units in the urban hinterland small-scale workshops that prevent the organization of workers, which evade protective labour legislation, and which run on black money, stolen electricity and powerful political patronage.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Aims and Objectives:

The aim of this project is to study and discuss the slow but sure death of Mumbai's textile mills in early nineties, and to uncover the aftermath in the form of Mall mania which followed the so called redevelopment of Mumbai's mills.

2.2 Scope and Limitations:

The scope of this project is only upto the theoretical and the related aspects of Mumbai's Mills and Malls. In this regard the provisions of law have been dealt with only so far as was important in understanding the underlying principles and enumeration of any model has been sought to be avoided.

2.3 Method of Writing:

The researcher has attempted to adopt an analytical approach. The method adopted is analytical in so far as it seeks to understand the role of the Mumbai's mills in the lives of lakhs of mill workers and how their livelihood turned upside down due to one wrenching strike.

2.4 Research Questions:

1. How Mumbai's mills did rise to glory?
2. How did the same mills fell from glory?
3. What is mall mania and the associated problems?

2.5 Sources of Data:

The researchers have relied upon primary sources like discussions with mill workers, NGOs etc. and secondary sources like journals, case reports, books, periodical materials and the internet have been used.

2.6 Chapterization:

The first section deals with the rise of Mumbai's mills.

The next section deals with the fall of Mumbai's mills from glory.

The last section deals with the onslaught of malls and problems associated with the same.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 The Rise of Mumbai's Mills

The mills of Girangaon were once integral to Mumbai's economy, particularly during the British colonial period, when Mumbai (then known as Bombay) was often referred to as the

"Manchester of the East". However, with the development of newer industries in and around Mumbai, these mills ceased to be profitable, and fell into a state of disrepair.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, India exported cotton to Britain, and then reimported the textile. In 1820, the total textile import was valued at Rs. 350,000. However, the cost had escalated significantly by 1860, when textile imports stood at Rs. 19.3 million. The impetus towards the founding of a cotton industry came from Indian entrepreneurs. The first Indian cotton mill, "The Bombay Spinning Mill", was opened in 1854 in Bombay by Cowasji Nanabhai Davar. Opposition from the Lancashire mill owners was eventually offset by the support of the British manufacturers of textile machinery.

The cotton mills of Bombay, and the rest of India, were owned and managed mainly by Indians. The initial investments came from families of the mill-owners, mainly obtained from trading. Later, when shares became available to the public, much of the ownership still remained Indian, of the 53 mills in the city in 1925, only 14 were British-owned. The management and directorships of these mills were also mainly Indian; of the 386 directorships recorded in 1925, only 44 were English.

By 1870, there were 13 mills in Bombay. Cotton exports grew during the American Civil War, when supplies from the USA's cotton plantations were interrupted. At the end of 1895, there were 70 mills; growing to 83 in 1915. A period of stagnation set in during the recession of the 1920s. In 1925, there were 81 mills in the city. After World War II, under strong competition from Japan, the mills declined. In 1953, there remained only 53 active mills in the city.

The rapid growth in mills was sustained by a large migration of mainly Marathi speaking workers into the city. Most often, the male member of the family would work in Bombay, leaving the rest of the family in the village. These workers were initially accommodated in hostels. Eventually, these *chawls* became tenements, with full families crammed into single rooms. The mills filled up Parel and then expanded westwards all the way to Worli.

3.2 The Fall of Mumbai's Mills

In late 1981, Dutta Samant was chosen by a large group of Bombay mill workers to lead them in a precarious conflict between the Bombay Millowners Association and the unions, thus rejecting the INTUC-affiliated Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh which had represented the mill workers for decades. Samant planned a massive strike forcing the entire industry of the city to be shut down for over a year. It was estimated that nearly 250,000 workers went on strike and more than 50 textile mills were shut in Bombay. In August 1982, the city police briefly went on strike, apparently in sympathy with the workers resulting into the army and Border Security Force to be called in to control the unrest. Samant demanded that, along with wage hikes, the government scrap the Bombay Industrial Act of 1947 and that the RMMS would no longer be the only official union of the city industry. While fighting for greater pay and better conditions for workers, Samant and his allies also sought to capitalize and establish their power on the trade union scene in Mumbai. Although Samant had links with the Congress and Maharashtra politicians but still he was considered as a serious political threat. Samant's control of the mill workers made politicians fear that his influence would spread to the port and dock workers and make him the most powerful union leader in India's commercial capital. Thus the government took a firm stance of rejecting Samant's demands and refusing to budge despite the severe economic losses suffered by the city and the industry. As the strike progressed through the months, Samant's militancy in the face of government obstinacy led to the failure of any attempts at negotiation. Disunity and dissatisfaction over the strike soon became apparent, and many textile mill owners began moving their plants outside the city. After a prolonged and destabilizing confrontation, the strike collapsed with no concessions having been obtained for the workers. The closure of textile mills across the city left tens of thousands of mill workers unemployed and, in the succeeding years, most of the industry moved away from Bombay after decades of being plagued by rising costs and union militancy. Although Samant remained

popular with a large block of union activists, his clout and control over Bombay trade unions disappeared.

The failure of the 1982 strike also marked a turning point in India's labour market, as it signalled the collapse of union power, and altered the relationship among business, politics and labour, according to scholars. Since, most mill workers were unskilled and often joined the mills without completing their schooling, thus when the economy boomed and new job opportunities arose, mill workers found it difficult to acquire new skills and move into better-paying jobs

In Mumbai, the downfall of the mills inverted the city's employment pattern. India has always had a large share of the so-called unorganized sector, but until the 1970s, Mumbai was different; in the city, the organized sector had always been the predominant employer. That changed as the textile industry withered, said the 2009 Mumbai Human Development Report published by the city's municipal corporation.

Eventually by the late eighties, the lands of the mill compounds became more valuable for the mill owners than the cloth these mills produce, and the workers whose livelihoods they have sustained for several generations. Thus In 1991, the fate of the mills began to be spelled out with the new Development Control (DC) Rules for the city, framed by Sharad Pawar Government, permitting the sale of a portion of the mill lands, ostensibly to channel the funds into the revival of the industry. This reinvestment never in fact occurred, the money earned from the lease and sale of the lands was instead siphoned off by the mill owners, and the mills closed and their premises redeveloped into high-rises, office spaces, discotheques, restaurants and bowling alleys. Parallel to this ruthless gentrification, mill workers saw their wages withheld, the gates of their mills arbitrarily shut, and the signing away of their rights by the sole recognised union for the textile industry, the Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh (RMMS), whose underworld patronage is well-known.

Since 1991, cases filed in the Board of Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR) in New Delhi, requesting permission to sell surplus mill lands have swelled. Management cited the “sickness” of the mills, when the real reason lay in the skyrocketing real estate values and the chance to relocate production, profiteer from land scams and tax breaks granted by the BIFR, while they closed the units, and sold the machinery and workers for scrap. At the peak of the property boom several years ago, the value of the mill lands reached somewhere around Rs 5000 crores. And though the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance which came to power in 1995 promised to halt the sale of mill lands, restart production and provide jobs, they proved even more enthusiastic partners to the mill owners profiteering.

With a further revision of the DC Rules, the new Congress-NCP Government has shown a determination to solve this festering issue and expedite the sale of mill and other reserved industrial lands, 23% of the land of the island city. The mills and working-class chawls of central Mumbai, crushed between the congested business district and the expanding suburbs, have in the past decade come under the combined pressure of the spiraling real estate market, the powerful lobby of builders and politicians, and the burgeoning middle-classes, starved of space. In the past decade, a battery of chattering economists, architects, society journalists and corporate promoters have advanced plans for the redevelopment of the mills into movie and design studios, five-star hotels, office spaces for multinational and corporate firms, and posh restaurants.

The casualty of these blinkered developments satisfying the consumption of the few, not production for the many has been Mumbai’s once-proud working-class; the mill-workers who spearheaded the trade union movement in India, and who today continue to hold out for their salaries and jobs. Historically, they have lent their strength to the calls for swadeshi and azadi, and their culture nestles in the heart of Mumbai’s growth into a vibrant industrial city, stretching back to the nineteenth century. Barely twenty years ago, the working population of “Girangaon”

the “village of mills”, a web of industrial units, chawls, markets and maidans which spreads across central Mumbai numbered 2.5 lakhs.

This has now dwindled to less than 50 thousand, and the displaced numbers have not been reabsorbed into the city’s organized workforce. Banished into a life of casual and insecure employment, some have died of trauma or starvation; others have taken to selling vegetables or working as security guards in the gleaming skyscrapers and offices coming up in the old mills. Most notably, it is estimated that much of the underworld’s ranks are composed of former mill-workers and their unemployed sons. Though unrecognized unions like the non-party Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti (GKSS) have made significant gains in reopening seven mills since 1989, since Independence the Mumbai mill workers have been straitjacketed to the representation of the recognized union.

With the removal of restrictions on land use that accompanied the 1991 DC Rules, land-grabbing has proliferated, the nexus between corrupt civic and state authorities, builders, and gangsters increased, as has the unregulated expansion horizontally and skywards of new hutments and high-rise. This privatized city presents a strangely postmodern vista. Advertising agencies, restaurants and bowling alleys, software companies and art galleries are sprouting in the former stronghold of working-class culture and the birthplace of India’s industrial modernity. While these new offices shelter beneath the towering mill chimneys that now jostle with skyscrapers for command of Mumbai’s skyline, there is a dark irony not lost on many Mumbaikars, least of all to the security guard who now tends to the gates of this newly discovered elite paradise.

The land can certainly be recycled, but the interests of all the stakeholders ought to be protected, beginning with the workers, who are the most badly affected in the short run. They have lost their jobs for no fault of their own and social justice demands that their needs are met first.

Ironically, rehabilitation of the textile workers shifts to the back burner, as greedy mill owners in collusion with builders, opportunistic governments and an indifferent bureaucracy, get busy

exploring ways to grab a maximum share of the lucrative pie in the rising land prices. The closure of textile mills has virtually maimed the Maharashtrian working class and snuffed out any possibility of the emergence of a vibrant lower middle class, so essential to sustain a viable manufacturing sector.

3.3 Mall Mania and the Related Problems

The redevelopment of Mumbai's cotton mills began in 1992, when efforts began to demolish the numerous cotton mills that once dotted the landscape of Mumbai, India, to make way for new residential and commercial buildings, as part of the wider modernization of Mumbai.

HERE COMES THE MALL

What is MALL:

I like to quote Wikipedia here.

“A shopping mall (or simply mall), shopping center, or shopping arcade is a building or set of buildings that contain stores, and has interconnecting walkways enabling visitors to easily walk from store to store. The walkways may or may not be enclosed.”

MALL HAUL

The great Indian mall boom has arrived and it's bustling with activity both in metros and two-tier cities. Estimates indicate that over 1000 malls are expected to come across the country by the end of 2012, according to a recent survey conducted by KSA Technopak that predicts India to be home for up to 1000 malls and of which around 280 will be in Mumbai alone . In fact, according to Mohammad Ali Alabbar, chairman of Middle East-based Emaar Properties, the company is planning over 100 malls in India already.

It is worth recalling a precedent of a kind in Mumbai. When the first mall Crossroads opened several years ago at Mahalaxmi, there was a huge rush due to the sheer novelty of the concept. However, as Indians are characteristically astute shoppers and are more conscious -- for the most part! -- Of price rather than brands, they visited the gleaming new attraction but did not buy very

much. The owners wanted to deter crowds from visiting the complex and tried to restrict entry to those who owned a credit card or a mobile phone. In other words, it wanted to create two kinds of citizens: 'haves' and 'have-nots'. As might be expected, there was a furor and the plan had to be shelved. However, not many are aware that the huge atrium within the complex is actually public space (when the building plans were passed) and by no stretch of the imagination could it be appropriated in this manner.

The 280 hectares that mills once occupied in central Mumbai are already seeing a massive makeover: malls, high-rises and the like. The National Textile Corporation, which owned 25 of Mumbai's 54 mills, is already thinking of building an international convention centre at its 12-acre seaside property known as India United Mills No 6. This is not, as may be imagined, out of some overwhelming desire to make Mumbai catch up with Shanghai or other cities of its ilk; such complexes have a floor space index (FSI, the ratio of buildable area to footprint) of 2.7, twice the prevailing ratio. The NTC argues quite unabashedly that this will enable it to put up a 75-storey tower there. What's more, if it loads FSI from its other mills on to this more valuable site, the sky is the limit -- permitting a staggering 120 floors! **But what about the supporting infrastructure?** The mill is located on Cadell Road, which is the main north-south transport axis. Any addition of cars will bring traffic to a grinding halt. Girangaon lacks any infrastructure worth the name -- whether by way of roads, pedestrian connections to railway stations, drainage, or open spaces. There is an important factor also to be borne in mind: the island city of Mumbai will shortly connect to the mainland by a trans-harbour sea link starting from Sewri, cheek-by-jowl with the mills. And there are 1,800 acres of adjoining land belonging to the Mumbai Port Trust which are also derelict and also open for development.

Further in malls people end up **buying unnecessary**, unwanted goods and pay over rated prices for it to compensate for the infrastructure cost, in turn we get trapped in its vicious circle. This mall fad has gripped the Gen- Next; nothing seems to be more fun than chilling out with friends

in a mall on a weekend, but has some very detrimental repercussions on them. All of us have become victims of this mall mania, are paying a very hard price for it and waste our precious time just wandering around doing nothing productive.

And now the big question is India ready for this mall boom???? **Where is the water and electricity for all these new malls???** India's mall boom is premature for the country's level of economic development and India needs to grow much faster. As India doesn't have the needed infrastructure to support the malls.

The unreliable electricity supply to the malls proliferate the use of diesel-powered generators which further lead to **pollution**; **parking** is another problem as most of the people don't have the right traffic sense.

Water, the elixir of life is also a grave concern for building up malls as malls will have to dig wells and suck up groundwater lowering the water level in the region. Malls not only pose a grave threat to our culture but also **degrade our environment**.

Malls have become a menace to **fire tragedies** and terrorist attacks as there is **no proper security** there. In an effort to make ourselves a more developed nation exuberantly leaping on to take the reins of civilization in our hands we may actually be turning a blind eye to the aftermath of something that we so happily created just in order to satiate our materialistic hunger.

Mall mania or fad, is driving us all mad, from movies to shopping, restaurants to coffee shops, C&K to McD, UCB to CCD, There is nothing you won't find here.

But the question that keeps throbbing in our minds: Is it all that we need at this pace? Are we really happy??? Or just following the mad rat race. So let's give it a thought, and poke our grey cells. And curb this mania before it becomes a malady.

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